Mercy remembered in Wrath.

A SERMON

PREACHED BY THE REV. DR. FULLER,

ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 1861,

BEING THE DAY OF NATIONAL FASTING, HUMILIATION AND PRAYER.

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SERMON.

"O, Lord, in wrath remember Mercy."—Habak iii: 2.

There are some duties which we never feel until our souls are bowed in humility; and the convictions of which will be erased by the incessant cares of life, its restless urgencies and activities, unless we are frequently reminded of them. They resemble signs and notices traced on our pavements, which we can only read when we look down, and which must be often swept and sometimes renewed, or they will be entirely obliterated.

Of these duties the most important is the practical recognition of God, as the inspector and controller of all things, the supreme moral governor of all men. God is so great, and we are so insignificant, that it is preposterous to suppose he observes our thoughts and actions,—such is the atheism of some men; but nothing can be more insincere than this pretext. For—not to speak of the pride and arrogance always concealed under this affectation of humility—let these libertines only be betrayed into a single good deed, and they at once regard God as their debtor, and seem to think that he has nothing to do but to notice and reward their conduct. Others deny that God can ever be angry with us for our actions, since sin is never against him but for him. "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" "Both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, to do whatsoever thy hand, and

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thy counsel determined before to be done." "Why then doth he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his will?" I know but a single passage in all the Scriptures, in which God shuts up the mouth of one of his creatures who pleads with him, and it is the overwhelming rebuke administered to an incorrigible scoffer, who had insulted Jehovah with this very blasphemy,—to whom the Apostle says, "Nay, but who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?"

The words to which I have invited your meditations this morning speak of God's wrath for sin. On this solemn day we are summoned to hear not only "the voice of the rod," but "of Him who appointed it." It was a season of suffering and rebuke, of fierce indignation and fearful omen, when the Prophet uttered the text. Upon such a day, we have assembled in this temple, and I know no language, no supplication, more exactly suited to our condition than that I have read, "O, Lord, in wrath remember mercy."

I. Habakkuk uttered this prayer for the nation. Tempests and hurricanes try the strength of a ship, and disclose its leaks. And as a people we come before God in a time of terrible calamity, when every thing in our political organization is strained and staggering and threatening shipwreck; when the noble vessel which, freighted with such rich and glorious hopes, once rode triumphantly on her course, is quivering from keelson to crosstrees, is smitten by blasts and lashed by raging billows that may well cause the heart of the stoutest pilot to quail and his face to gather paleness. Thirty years ago there appeared on the skirts of our horizon a cloud no bigger than a man's hand. There it has since hung portentously, mustering gloomy elements of destruction, ever and anon shooting baleful fires, muttering deep though distant thunders. And now the heavens are all black with clouds, and a storm is discharging itself upon us, sweeping like a tropical tornado, mocking to scorn all human skill and power in its fierceness and its fury. Such is our condition. And the first truth suggested by the text and the occasion is, that as a nation we are guilty, and God is angry with us for our sins.

While politics should be scrupulously excluded from the pulpit, the duties of states, rulers, legislators, are a very different thing; and belong to religion. In the teachings of the Bible, nations have an organic character, and they are constantly held to a responsibility for their conduct as rigorous as that of individuals. Nor was there ever a period when it was more necessary to urge upon governments that great maxim, recorded by the wisest of princes, after long experience, that "Righteousness alone exalteth a nation."

"Righteousness;" and by this I mean true religion. Governments are established for purposes strictly temporal, churches for purposes strictly spiritual. The union of Church and State is, therefore, as incongruous a thing as would be the combination of the church with a gas company or a railroad corporation. But let us not go to the other extreme. Let us never forget that a state, like an individual, must have a religion. Civil law and philosophy cannot repress the depravities of our nature. Without the controlling fear of God, men would have to be governed as the keeper of wild beasts predominates over his menagerie—distributing food to some, and blows to others whose might and ferocity could rend him to pieces in a moment. A state must have a religion, and it must be the true religion; otherwise, Solomon's proverb is a glaring falsehood. How can a nation be elevated by the religion of idolatry, which mocks God and degrades all that is noble in humanity? How can a nation be exalted by the religion of superstition, which stultifies the human intellect? or by the faith of the fanatic, with its unrelenting malignity? or by the heresy of the antinomian, which turns the grace of God into licentiousness?

By "Righteousness" I mean the doctrines and spirit of the Gospel. These are the true strength and glory of a nation—a proposition this which is almost self-evident.

For, if we use the term Nation as comprehending the whole people, we at once feel that the real prosperity and glory of a community are not wealth, nor numbers, nor flourishing commerce, nor splendid palaces, nor magnificent

armies and victories and triumphal arches. May God deliver us from such prosperity, unless it be hallowed to a noble use. The great thing in a state is Man himself; and the only true prosperity of a people is the moral elevation of the citizen—the intelligence, virtue, integrity, domestic purity, which cause the human soul to grow, and which are inbred and nourished by the religion of Jesus. Society is a structure whose stability depends not upon the accomplishments and refinements of a few elevated minds, but upon the principles which the Gospel establishes in the public heart and conscience; it is a pyramid supported by its granite base, not by the sculptured ornaments that decorate and crown its shaft.

Or, if we employ the word Nation with reference to the Government, there is no civil polity which Christianity does not convert into a source of honor and happiness. It corrects the abuses of a monarchy; it rebukes the pride and ambition of an aristocracy; above all, it reaches and purifies the springs of a popular administration, shedding the most healthful influence over all the institutions of the republic.

Nations, then, like individuals, are accountable to God. Governments are kept to a strict reckoning, and the constituency who invest rulers with authority are dealt with as stewards to whom God has delegated most solemn trusts. And, now, if a nation—especially a nation blessed with the Gospel—shall be perfidious to its duty, why then it stands before the Moral Governor of the universe as a heinous criminal, and will be dealt with as such. It will be dealt with *now*. For individuals there is a judgment after death, and they may be left to the retributions of eternity; but nations, as such, exist only in the present economy. While it is most unjust, then, to pronounce any man guilty because he is afflicted—a cruelty which Jesus condemned in the insinuation of the Jews as to the man born blind—it may be affirmed with positive certainty, that no judgment ever falls upon a nation except as a chastisement for national sins. And it is with equity that nations are sorely punished. "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to

build and to plant it,''—such is the language in which Jehovah declares that nations are established by him for high and holy purposes. Their work is of course transcendently more momentous than that of any individual. They are the ministers, the apostles created and ordained by sovereign wisdom and love for the sublimest mission; and just in proportion to the trust confided to them, will be their guilt, if they prove faithless.

My friends, the propositions which I have thus advanced commend themselves at once to your minds. Nor can I have announced these truths even thus generally, without forcing upon you the conviction that we are most guilty, and that God is correcting us for our sins. When, where, I ask you, under the whole heavens, has there ever been a people so distinguished by the special marks of the favor of the Most High? When, where, a people so signally raised up to be a blessing to the whole earth? And when, where, a people who have been more perfidious to their high calling? "And shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord, shall not my soul be avenged upon such a nation as this?''

All this, however, I feel to be too vague. These generalities affect nobody. Let us then go a little into detail. Of course, you will understand me as referring to our sins before any disruption had severed the Union and rent it into hostile fragments. Were I to speak of the iniquities now crying to heaven from every portion of the land, I should be compelled to place this unnatural war at the head of the catalogue. Upon whom the guilt lies, I leave for the Judge of all to determine. I owe it to you, who have ever generously spared your pastor the misery of seeing the harmony of a church dearer to him than life disturbed by politics—I owe it to the sanctity of this hour—to the charity of this place—to the purity of this pulpit from which Christ only has ever been preached, not to breathe a whisper upon so delicate and painful a question.

My brethren, when I so far forget my duty to you, to my office, to my Master who says "My kingdom is not of this world,''—when I can so degrade the Christian minis-

try, as to descend into the arena of political strife and partisan clamor ;—above all, when, at such an awful crisis as this, instead of weeping between the porch and the altar and mingling with you in the profoundest humiliation, instead of lifting up that cross which speaks peace among men,—I am found fulminating anathemas from this desk, seeking to inflame the worst passions of the human heart, and to intensify wrath, hatred, malice, vindictiveness among those who ought to love as brothers ;—when I am thus recreant to men and to God ;—then cease to respect me, class me among those apostates from the religion of the meek and loving Jesus who have for years been casting firebrands into that temple, around whose altars our fathers —the Morning Stars of this glorious Republic—sang together and shouted for joy.

But were I to speak of the sins now crying to heaven from every part of the land, I would place this dismal fratricidal war at the head of the dark catalogue. For war is a crime, always everywhere a crime, the prolific source of the worst crimes; nor can any man become its advocate who reflects upon the immortality and accountability of the thousands that, wholly unprepared, with the fiercest passions glowing in their breasts, are hurried instantaneously from the battle-field into the presence of the Supreme Judge. The only arms of a Christian, his only victories are those of peace. * Jesus commands us to love our enemies, and to do them all the good we can ; war requires us to hate our enemies, and to do them all the harm we can. In the words of the Apostle, "Wars and fightings come from the lusts that war in our corrupt natures." In the language of one of the noblest men of this or any age—of one whose work has long been a classic in our schools and colleges, and whom I must ever love and honor, "all wars are contrary to the revealed will of God ; and the individual has no right to commit to society, nor society to commit to the government, the power to declare war. Hence,

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*Victoriæ, difficiles, quidem, et incruentæ, illis bellicis et cruentis longé pulchriores. Milton, Defens, Sec. p. 731.

to all arguments brought in favor of war, it would be a sufficient answer, that God has forbidden it, and that no consequences can be possibly conceived to arise from keeping his law, so terrible as those which must arise from violating it. God commands us to love every man, alien or citizen, Samaritan or Jew, as ourselves; and the act neither of society, nor of government can render it our duty to violate this command."†

But this thought has carried me farther than I intended. You will understand me as alluding to the United States in their integrity; for it is in reference to our sins as a whole people, that God is punishing us. It is of these sins I speak.

And, now, what shall I say? Where shall I begin? Where can I end? "Ah! sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters; they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger. Why should ye be stricken any more? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint, from the sole of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores." God in mercy grant, that it may not be necessary soon to add the dreary dirge of the prophet which follows that description: "Your country is desolate, your cities burnt with fire, your land strangers devour it in your presence."

Our Sins. And let me begin with those of our General Government. It is the doctrine of demagogues, that, as the whole people cannot meet, they elect delegates who are to obey their instructions. But this idea of principal and agent has no place in a representative government. The true theory of such a system is, that men are chosen who are eminent for wisdom, uprightness, dignity, experience, and that they are to administer public affairs for the good of the nation. Now, our Federal Government rests entirely upon the Constitution; but, while we profess to be a Christian people, that Constitution is a document abso-

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†Wayland's Moral Science, p. 441.

lutely atheistical. I yield to no one in my admiration of that instrument as a monument of human wisdom and patriotism. Would that its sanctity had ever been preserved inviolate! It is saying little to declare, that, with God's permission, I would cheerfully lay down my life, that I might see that august charter restored to its original virtue,—knowing no North, no South, no East, no West—but, full high advanced as an ensign to the nation, like the pillar of fire and cloud, heralding a united people to honor and true glory. But, while the jurist must admire the Constitution, the Christian must regard it with sorrow and alarm. From the first word to the last, there is not even an allusion to that Being who is the King of nations, who, armed with infinite power, pervades all nature with his presence, and sits as supreme head of the universe. Had it been composed by Pagans, or Mohammedans, or Atheists, it could not have shut out every idea of Deity with a more irreligious precaution.

Under the provisions of this Constitution, legislators and rulers are appointed by the people; and what, at least for forty years, have been the qualifications required? Disinterestedness? virtue? piety? Nothing of the kind. The single question has everywhere been as to allegiance to some faction struggling for power. He is a good Democrat, a good Republican, his record shows his loyalty to a party, if elected all his energies will be devoted to a party, he will seek to exalt a party, and to secure the spoils of victory for a party. Suppose, during any canvass for the last forty years, that some candidate had been proposed, whose claim was based upon his uprightness and purity, what caucus would have selected such a leader? Suppose (but the very idea is preposterous) that at the hustings, people should ever have been urged to range themselves on the Lord's side, and to cast their suffrages for a man because —in addition to other excellences—he was superior to party, and was a meek and faithful disciple of Jesus; where, when, would such an appeal have provoked anything but astonishment and secret ridicule? Reflect upon the arts and intrigues employed to secure success at our elections. It may be safely affirmed, that, from Maine to

Texas, bribery and corruption have been the common weapons of political rivalry, and that the traffic in votes has got to be a business as well established and as industriously and systematically pursued as any merchandize in the stores or the shambles. Thus elected, our rulers and representatives assemble at Washington ; and you know what the eye of God has seen there, with a few noble exceptions. There the Sabbath has been openly despised. There the name of God has been everywhere blasphemed. There pride, luxury, licentiousness, have held their carnivals. There power and patronage have been abused for selfish and mercenary objects. There vast sums extorted from honest industry have been most profligately wasted and often embezzled. And there—in the very halls which ought to be consecrated to calm wisdom and true patriotism, to the good of mankind and the fear of God,—there has been exhibited a ruffianism which would have disgraced barbarians. Sectional rancor, party malignity, low, ribald, personal scurrility—these have long been among the most striking elements of our parliamentary rhetoric. And bludgeons, daggers, pistols, bowie knives, the threats and blows of the assassin, the deliberate murders of the duellist—these have been the conspicuous proofs of our parliamentary wisdom and piety. And think you, my friends, as the Lord formerly said to his prophet Ezekiel, think you, "it is a light thing that such abominations are committed?" No, God will visit, God is now visiting us for sins like these in high places.

When from the General Government, we pass to that of the States, we find the same sins flaunting through the land ; the same bribery, the same corruptions, the same frauds, the same embezzlements, the same violence, the same—in short the same outrages upon all religion and patriotism. But, looking at this State, becoming a prophet in my own country, I find a new count in the indictment. I refer to Slavery. All who know any thing of so humble an individual as myself, know my sentiments as to this institution. Here it is. We are not responsible for its introduction ; and he is either a politician, or a man made mad not by much learning but much ignorance, who as-

serts that it can be suddenly eradicated from our social system. But have we been faithful to this other race who are in our power, and therefore especially entrusted to our care? Have we recognized their relation to us as members of a common fatherhood and brotherhood? Have we rendered to them—to their bodies, minds, souls—"the things that are just and equal, remembering that we too have a Master in heaven?"

Let us go on and glance at the guilt of our churches. Jesus is especially jealous of the purity and fidelity of his church; it is his peculiar treasure purchased with his own blood. There have been many fiery disputes as to the true church. Peace to the ashes of all such controversies! In the Scriptures the Greek term translated "*church*" is Εκκλησια—a noun derived from the verb Εκκαλεω, *to call out*. The church of Christ is a body called by grace out of the world; called that it may, by its holiness, condemn the world, as righteous Lot "condemned the wickedness of Sodom;" called to exemplify the doctrines of the Gospel, and thus to be a light to the world. The members of this church publicly profess that they "are not their own," —that their wealth, talents, influence, time, life, are all offered as a grateful sacrifice to the Redeemer. Nor is their duty restricted to this or any land. The church exists under a Constitution which binds it to "go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Enter into these truths; then look at the bodies called churches, and the people called Christians—the worldliness, pride, covetousness, selfishness, which have effaced almost entirely every line of demarcation between the church and the world. "Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?" Nor tell me, that, for this perfidy and perjury, God will punish the churches. This is true. To the minister commissioned to execute vengeance upon guilty Jerusalem the command was, "Begin at my sanctuary." Judgment may begin at the house of God. But—as the fires of Sodom paid no regard to the houses and possessions of Lot—so, when Jonah betrayed his trust, the winds and waves did not distinguish between

him and those who were with him, but smote the ship until it was well nigh "broken in pieces."

It is a beautiful thought of the Apostle, when, writing to heads of families among the first disciples, he sends greetings to "the churches in their houses." In the contemplation of the gospel, every Christian family ought to be a church. There, within a shrine more sacred than aisle and chancel and "fretted vault," the father, as a priest over his own house, is to offer morning and evening incense. And there the holy influence of a mother's love is to embrace the earliest affections of her children—their young faith, hope, love—and twine them like tendrils around the Cross, that they may spring and grow upwards. The family ought to find its type not only in the church on earth, but the church in heaven. What a mournful contrast to such a community is presented to the sight of God by the families of this land. To what different objects are the cares and solicitudes of most parents devoted. I know that, when your child dies, you assure us that your great concern is about the soul and its salvation; but how can we believe you, when we observe your conduct towards those children who are still spared? when we see in you scarcely a desire that they may be humble followers of Jesus, but restless boundless anxiety that they may be rich and honored, may gratify those passions which war against the soul? You are priests, not to devote your offspring to God, but to decorate them as offerings to the world and its fatal attractions. Here, in this domestic unfaithfulness, is a crime so unnatural and shocking, that God's peculiar displeasure burns against it; and we hear his prophet uttering this frightful anathema: "Pour out thy fury upon the families that call not upon thy name."

Up to this time I have been speaking of the sins committed by bodies raised up by God to meet the social wants of our nature. But, as these organizations are composed of the members of society, if we would go to the sources of our crimes, we must turn our eyes to the community around us. And, when we draw within the circle of our observation the character and manners of the world in which we live, what dismal phenomena present them-

selves on every side. "Thus, saith the Lord, for three transgressions of Damascus, yea for four, will I not turn away the punishment thereof."

Atheism. We are shocked at this charge. But God is the moral Governor of the universe. Not to recognize him, is atheism. And we can look nowhere, without seeing that, in their thoughts, their plans, their whole lives, almost all men are "without God in the world."

Ingratitude. Review the history of this nation, and you will instinctively exclaim, "He hath not dealt thus with any people." How have we dealt with him? Instead of leading us to repentance, his goodness has nourished vanity, boasting, an insane independence. Our vaunted refinement has been a whited sepulchre, fair without, but "within full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." Wealth has become a snare and a bane. Prosperity has ministered to pride, arrogance, luxury. "Because they have no changes, therefore, they fear not God." These disasters were needed. God has tried blessings upon us; he is now trying judgments. He is saying, "I will go and return unto my place, till they acknowledge their offences and seek my face. In their affliction they will seek me early."

A degeneracy from all true love of country. Mr. Webster was the last of a noble army of martyrs who took in the whole Republic in their ample patriotism; and he fell a victim to his magnanimity. We have become a nation of politicians and scramblers for office, giving up to section and party, and self, the zeal and devotion which were due to the public weal; filled, under the pretence of principle, with restless eager vanity; convulsing society by the incessant, often vindictive struggles of ambition in men born for obscurity to calumniate, supplant, and destroy, that they may grasp that most seductive of all prizes, political power.

A fourth evil under our sun has been, the decay of that love of liberty which inspired the venerable Father of his country and all those heroical men who laid the foundations of this free government, causing them to pledge their lives, their interests, and their sacred honor to an undertaking so sublime. This loyalty to freedom has long been

"ready to die." If these distractions continue long, I fear a ruined and demoralized people will be ready to exchange liberty for repose even under a despotism. May God help us to "be watchful and strengthen the things that remain."

Everywhere among our population is seen a fifth and heinous iniquity. It is a contempt for the Revelation which has been in mercy vouchsafed to us. No mortal thought can appreciate the worth of the Bible, the Sabbath, and the Sanctuary. That volume, to unloose whose seals the Lamb of God welcomed death, has not only been openly assailed by Infidelity, but its sacred pages have been everywhere neglected. The Sanctuary has been despised. And, for convenience, for pleasure, for profit, the Sabbath has been profaned by the people, by corporations, by judges, by rulers; and this, often under the auspices of legislative enactments.

In enumerating the sins which especially attract the curses of heaven, Isaiah specifies one which is peculiarly an American vice, though it is indeed the besetting sin of humanity. "Wo unto them who add house to house, and land to land." "Covetousness is idolatry." Idolatry is not a speculative error; it bows the whole man down, and binds and moulds all the passions of its votaries. Hence idolatry is the object of God's signal detestation. And if this be so, we can be at no loss for the cause of these chastisements visited upon this nation. For here is an idolatry which pervades all classes and conditions. To it t e whole land is devoted as a temple. Its power surrounds and presses us like the atmosphere. Seven days are too few for its week of sabbaths. Day and night are too short for its devout worship.

We are a by-word over the whole earth for this reckless lust of money; for a profligate eagerness to amass large fortunes, with but little prudery about the means employed. Our mercantile code has repealed every letter of the Sermon on the Mount. On 'Change it is not Jesus, but Machiavelli, who teaches ethics. Uprightness is no longer with us—what it was to our simple forefathers—an ultimate good; it is only the means to an end. The morality of trade finds its oracles neither in the Word of God nor in conscience, but in the low calculations of expediency and

profit. Honesty is a virtue, while it is the best policy; otherwise, it is a commodity too costly for us to deal in. A reputation for integrity is chiefly important because it is a profitable investment. The great thing is, to get money. If the representative man of this age and country could, like Paul, be caught up into the third heaven, it would prove only the ecstasy of a speculator and adventurer; his only beatific vision would be the golden streets; and, when brought back, his only grief would be, that so many trodden shekels had been left behind. At every turn is seen the jobber described by Solomon, saying, "It is naught, it is naught, but when he goeth his way, then he boasteth." This every day rogue is, however, too insignificant to attract much notice. If we would comprehend the cool atrocity of unprincipled and exhaustless enterprise which has placed us, as a commercial people, upon such a bad eminence, we must study it in our stock gamblers, and rich bankrupts, above all in the plunderers of our public exchequers. That a man may be honest as a citizen, pious as a church member, and yet an unscrupulous knave as a politician—this is a maxim not confined to us. But there is one proverb, of which we can claim the exclusive authorship. It is, that fraud loses half its infamy, by losing all its timidity. What would be theft in a shop, is, in a public office, the commendable forethought of the unjust steward in the Parable. The felony which would consign a merchant's clerk to the dungeon for life, need only be committed against the Government, and be multiplied by a hundred thousand, and it at once rises to something like respectability. It meets not only sympathy, but a sort of admiration.

As I said, however, I will never have done with these details. Everywhere guilt and corruption stalk abroad with unblushing front. The land mourns for drunkenness; and this State, like others, derives much of its revenue from licenses to curse women with a blight far more mournful than widowhood, to make children worse than orphans, to destroy soul and body for time and eternity. Men's mouths are full of cursing; children are baptized unto profanity, and are perfected in it at our schools and on our streets. In fine, Jehovah says, "Cursed be the

man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." And if ever a people defied that imprecation, we are the people. Men and brethren, Cotton is not king; God is King. Gunpowder is not king; education is not king; the Constitution is not king; the people are not king; the President is not king; the army is not king. No, no, "The Lord he is God, the Lord he is God." But, as fire had to come down from heaven, and vindicate the sovereignty of Jehovah, and thus extort from Israel that sublime confession; so God will have to burn up our earthly confidences, before we will know that the Lord is God, and, casting away all our idols, will crown Jesus Lord of all.

II. As a nation we are most guilty and God is angry with us for our sins. I was right when I made this assertion, I pass now to a second truth of most solemn portent, which I must treat briefly, but to which, for that very reason, it becomes you all at this time to give the more earnest heed. This proposition is, that present chastisements are oftentimes only the precursors of more fearful dispensations.

That judgment has begun upon us, you, alas! require no preacher to warn you. It is written in the Book of Judges, that when Benjamin, "little Benjamin," was alienated from Israel, the men of all the other tribes "came to the house of God, and abode there till evening before God, and lifted up their voices and wept sore, and said, O Lord God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to-day one tribe lacking in Israel?" Would that we had witnessed such a lovely spectacle of affection among the members of this Union, at the period when one of them, a little one—but dear to my heart—was separated from the other States. Would that we could see this spirit of true patriotism and piety to-day. Would that—instead of declamations and harrangues which exasperate fierce passions—we all, the people, the rulers, the ministers of Christ, were this morning gathered in the house of God, bathed in tears, and saying, O Lord God of our Fathers, why is this come to pass in the land, that there should be so many tribes lacking in

Israel? Why is it? Who is guilty of the sin which hath brought this sore calamity upon us? Search us, oh God—and search our brethren who are severed from us, and restore us to the paths of righteousness and peace! Nor has there been only alienation. "The primal eldest curse" is on us. The soil redeemed by our common fathers has been soaked with fratricidal blood. Such is our bitter affliction, after naming which, I can hardly think of our commercial stagnation and desolation, sad as that is; or of the pecuniary distress and poverty which multitudes are facing but cannot outface.

All this, however, may be only the premonition of what is to come. There is at present a pause;—may it not be that God is giving us "space to repent?"—that he has waited for this day, to try us and see if we will humble ourselves and forsake our sins? There is a pause;—but it may be only the calm which precedes the rush of the whirlwind—the interval between the roar of a distant park of artillery, and the crash of the iron tempest shivering, shattering everything in its path.

Present judgments are the precursors of more fearful judgments, when, instead of bowing humbly before the chastener and seeking deliverance from him, a people harden their hearts and proudly rely upon their own wisdom and power. Thus it was with Pharoah. At first he reeled under the strokes from an unseen almighty hand; but soon he rallied, and resolved to brave and fight the crisis out in his own imperial grandeur. You remember the issue. Bolt followed bolt, till he perished miserably forever. How does this article apply to you, my brethren? I do not know. I cannot decide. I therefore say nothing. But you know. You can decide. You can answer.

Present judgments are premonitions of more fearful judgments, when the terrors and supplications of a people have reference not to their guilt, but to their dangers and losses. "Lord when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see." Can any thing more outrage a jealous God than this temper which, even under his chastisements, only proves how resolutely he is contemned, and how tenacious-

ly the world is loved? Genuine sorrow is described as "Godly sorrow"—that is to say, it is sorrow such as we may suppose God to feel in view of sin: it is grief like that which pierced the Redeemer's heart, when he saw the city and wept over it; it is anguish for the insult offered to the tenderest of Fathers, and for the wrong inflicted upon the soul. With this the Scriptures contrast "the sorrow of the world,"—a distress purely selfish—misery, not from a sense of the evil of sin, but from the fear of its punishment. How does this article apply to you, my brethren? I do not know. I cannot decide. I therefore say nothing. But you know. You can decide. You can answer.

Our last maxim as to the laws by which God is wont to regulate his dealings with a people when once he begins to afflict them, has respect to the sincerity of their repentance under his first visitations. "The word of the Lord came unto me saying, at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down and to destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do them." At the commencement of this year we assembled in this sanctuary, to confess our sins as a nation and individuals, to humble ourselves beneath the impending vengeance of heaven, and to hear and obey "the voice of the rod." Were you then sincere? Or did you only mock God? "When he slew them, then they sought him; they returned and enquired early after God; and they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their Redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouths, and they lied unto him with their tongues." It rests with you, men and brethren, to apply this thought. How does it affect you? What have been the fruits of all the confessions you uttered on that solemn fast day? of all the vows you then made? of all the tears you then shed? I do not know. I cannot speak. I cannot answer. But you know. You can speak. You can answer.

And yet why may I not speak? why may I not decide? why should I not answer? Ah, my brethren, my brethren, if I were to apply these tests severely, and by them

forecast your destiny, I should have no heart to stand here and plead with you for God, or with God for you. If I did not remember that into whatever depths we may sink, the blood of Christ can reach and rescue us—that "even from thence, if we seek the Lord our God, we shall find him, if we seek him with all our heart and with all our soul"—if I did not remember this, I should be dumb, for my ministry could be only a prophecy of mourning, lamentation and woe; fearfulness and trembling would take hold on me, and rivers of waters would run down my eyes, for I would know that the calamities now pressing upon us are only the faint presages of calamities far more terrible; coming events would, to my vision, scarf and muffle up all the future in lurid dismal clouds and darkness. If God's ways were as our ways, and his thoughts as our thoughts, my ears would but take in these dreadful words, "I will cast them out of my sight. Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me; for I will not hear thee." "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, my mind could not be towards this people." If God's ways were as our ways, and his thoughts as our thoughts ——— but, blessed be his gracious name! hosannahs to that love which hath interposed to save the lost, to respite the righteous sentence and arrest the lifted thunder! thanks be unto God! his ways are not as our ways, neither are his thoughts as our thoughts. It is when reasoning with guilty man on this very subject of pardon for the vilest, that our injured Father repeats over and over the most earnest tender assurances of his long suffering forgiving mercy. And it is these assurances which embolden me again to unite with you and lead your devotions on this solemn occasion. It is because "He, being full of compassion, forgives our iniquities and destroys us not, but many a time turns his anger away, and does not stir up all his wrath,"—it is this which has encouraged me to come here, and exhort, animate, console you; to conjure you, by the mercies of God, and by all your hopes and fears, that your penitence, your faith, your reformation may be such as to avert the overhanging

wrath, and to attract the blessings promised to the humble and the contrite.

"O Lord, in wrath remember mercy!" This was the prayer with which I began this discourse. And this prayer I adjure you to make your fervent, effectual, unrelaxing supplication, until these calamities shall be overpast. But remember, this prayer is the cry of a soul lying low before God, and fixing its pleading eye steadfastly upon that great atonement through which alone mercy can reach such wretches as we are. Nor can it be uttered sincerely, unless we enter into its spirit and breathe all its sighs and aspirations.

This prayer cannot be ours, until we awake from insensibility under the anger of the great and dreadful God. "Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king nor any of his servants." Apathy under God's judgments is an "evident token of perdition" upon a smitten people. And with reason. For it betrays a rooted unbelief, hardness, contempt, most insulting to the Majesty of heaven.

Nor can we truly utter this prayer, until we recognize God's purposes in chastening us, and comply with them. Whether he afflicts us to bring our sins to remembrance, or to show us their heinousness, or to wean us from our idolatry, or to assert his sovereignty over us and all we have and hope for, our first duty is to correspond to his movements. "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee, yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments." "I will say unto God, do not condemn me. Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." "Clouds and darkness are round about thee; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of thy throne." Such must be the language of our hearts; and our lives must attest the sincerity of this confession, this sympathy with the divine will concerning us.

Lastly, we make this prayer and supplication, only when, acknowledging our sins, having our iniquities always before us--we renounce all other hope, and cast ourselves utterly upon the mercy of God through Christ Jesus our Saviour. To frame excuses—to trust in our own strength,

in chariots and horses and armies—to confess the sins of others, and exaggerate their guilt, and dare to appeal to the scrutiny of Omniscient Justice for our own innocence—all this is impiously to invoke unmingled wrath, unmitigated ruin.

No, no, there is only one single hope left us; "O Lord, in wrath remember mercy." But this hope is left us, and —inspired by this hope—I do not despond for this land; I am full of confidence; my soul rises from the dust, and stands erect, and rejoices in full assurance of compassion, mercy, deliverance from on high. I cannot despond; for my expectations are from Him who hath promised, and who "keepeth covenant and mercy." I will not, cannot despond. God's love in times past forbids the thought, that he will abandon us amidst these raging waves, that he can leave us to perish in this fiery ordeal. His own right hand, his stretched out arm hath planted a people on these shores. He hath distinguished them above all nations by his loving kindness and tender care. He hath been our help in ages gone by; and, "because he hath been our help, therefore in the shadow of his wings we will rejoice." This whole people, from ocean to ocean, from the lakes to the gulf, have cried to him again and again. This day, we—the people, the rulers, magistrates, judges, his churches—fall at his feet, and, with united heart and voice, deprecate the vengeance we justly merit, and supplicate the mercy he hath graciously promised. "Promotion cometh neither from the East, nor from the West, nor from the South; but God is the judge; he putteth down one, and setteth up another." And, though these afflictions are for the present not joyous but most grievous and heart rending, yet I must question the efficacy of prayer, before I can doubt that "afterwards they will work the peaceable fruits of righteousness," through the overruling power and wisdom of Him who doeth all things well.

But it is time for me to finish. My dearly beloved friends and brethren, I have spoken to you not as I wished, but as I could. You have heard truths uttered in the simplicity, honesty, affection which become a Christian

pulpit. Instead of neglecting this call to humiliation fasting and prayer, I have eagerly availed myself of it. I only wish we could observe such a day every week, until our cries shall move Him who doth not willingly afflict the children of men, who threatens that he may be disarmed. If we have any fear of God, if any love for our whole country, for man, for the suffering cause of Jesus at home and abroad,—we must welcome any and every occasion for devout fasting, humiliation, and supplication.

I do implore you all to cherish the deep solemnity due to a time like this. "The Lord hath watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us." God's wrath so far surpasses all other calamities, that the very thought of it would agitate, alarm, frighten us, were we not blinded and stupified by sin. This wrath has now begun to descend upon our guilty land. Jehovah is saying, "Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish my anger upon thee, and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thy abominations. And my eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity. I will recompense thee according to thy ways, and the abominations in the midst of thee; and you shall know that I am the Lord. The time is come, the day draweth near. Destruction cometh, and they shall seek peace, and there shall be none. I will do unto them after their way, according to their deserts will I judge them, and they shall know that I am the Lord." Brethren, dear brethren, God is serious in his present dealings with us; oh, let us be serious. Through our cities and villages, and in our own streets, a voice is heard, wailing out this warning, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed." Let us, like that doomed capital, clothe ourselves in sackcloth and ashes. "The wrath of man worketh never the righteousness of God." The wrath, clamor, bitterness, vindictiveness, crimination and recrimination, which have so often profaned our national fasts, would be shocking to every moral sentiment in an hour like this; they would be scarcely more insane and impious at the last Judgment and before the great white throne. Whatever others do, let us abhor ourselves before God as a na-

tion, and let us with one voice cry unto him and say, "O Lord, in wrath remember mercy."

Nor let us be satisfied with general confessions, which are almost always only an ingenious mode of deceiving and flattering ourselves in our own eyes. We should lament the iniquities abounding in the land, but we can repent only of our own sins. Let each of us enter into his own bosom, and explore his own heart and life. "*I hearkened and heard but they spake not aright; no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?*" Let each enquire: "Lord is it I? Lord is it I?" "Let us turn every one from his evil way, and who can tell if God will turn and repent and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" "Search *me*, oh God, and know *my* heart; try *me*, and know *my* thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in *me* and lead *me* in the way everlasting."

Prepare to meet thy God, oh Israel. Let us prepare for this solemn interview, whether in the judgments now upon us, or in the Judgment after death. After all, whatever may betide us, God's will must triumph. Be this our consolation in the darkest moment. What his inscrutable wisdom designs, I know not; whether to break up these once United States, and to make of them two great nations, who, forgetting this unnatural strife, cherishing only the hallowed memories of the past, shall live side by side in alliance and amity; or whether to reconstruct the Union, to corroborate its vigor by teaching us many severe lessons of mutual forbearance, of honest compliance with constitutional compacts, of reciprocal dependence, of political wisdom and religious obligation; or whether to destroy us altogether, as he has blotted out other guilty empires. But this one thing I know, that all shall work together for his glory, and for the good of them that love and obey him.

And I know more. I know that we are rapidly passing away, and shall to-morrow stand amidst the realities of that eternity, in the light of which all earthly things will shrink into insignificance—all mortal conflicts will appear only as the delirious frenzy of lunatics contending about straws. For, we shall then see that the soul alone has real greatness, that salvation alone is worthy of our cares and

toils and sacrifices. Let us save our souls. Let us secure the great salvation. Let us prepare to meet our God in death and at the dread tribunal. Jesus is the "hiding place from the wind, and the covert from the tempest." Sheltered beneath his cross, we are safe for time and eternity.

Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless. "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee, and hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." Into these pavilions, these inner sanctuaries of almighty power, unerring wisdom, eternal faithfulness and love, let us enter. And let our prayers for a guilty land cause all these chambers to resound, till our cries go up into the ear and penetrate and melt the heart of that God who is waiting to be gracious.

"O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments. O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day;—to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel that are near and that are far off, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing that they might not obey thy voice. Therefore the curse is poured upon us. O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thy anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain; because, for our sins and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. Now, therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his

supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O, Lord hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thy own sake, O my God; for thy city and thy people are called by thy name."

"O Lord, in wrath remember mercy."